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ABSTRACT

One result of the ambiguity surrounding future jobs is a number of myths not only about what jobs will be available and what they will be like but also about how to prepare for them. The first myth is "40 years and out," the notion that people will work continuously with one organization until retirement. The reality is that individuals need to be prepared for careers that are likely to include involuntary job loss as well as many job changes. The second myth is that a college education will guarantee a good job. Good jobs will be available, but to get them graduates will have to begin looking earlier and be more astute about which job search strategies they use. The third myth is that manufacturing jobs will disappear. The reality is that although manufacturing jobs are projected to continue to decrease, they are a long way from disappearing. A likely scenario for future manufacturing jobs is that they will change radically: new manufacturing jobs will be created that will require different skills and pay less. The fourth myth is that technology will simplify work. The current consensus is that technology has not simplified work. Instead, what technology has done is eliminate many low-level jobs and increased the skill levels required for those that remain. The fifth myth is that job growth will level off. The United States is still creating about 2 million new jobs every year. Adult, career, and vocational educators must instill in learners the concept of lifelong learning, encourage participation in work experience, and prepare learners to expect career changes. (YLB)

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Jobs in the Future
Myths and Realities

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Myths and **REALITIES**

by Susan Imel *1994*

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JOBS IN THE FUTURE

Few topics generate as much debate as the future of jobs. A number of factors influence the discussion about jobs in the future, including current changes in the nature of the workplace, corporate restructuring, global competition, military downsizing, changes in the skill requirements of jobs, and continued shifts in production from goods to services. How these factors will play themselves out in terms of future jobs is unclear. One result of the ambiguity surrounding future jobs is a number of myths not only about what jobs will be available and what they will be like but also about how to prepare for them. This ***Myths and Realities*** examines some of the myths surrounding jobs in the future through a discussion of likely realities based on current trends.

Myth: "Forty Years and Out"

Reality: Individuals can no longer plan on spending their entire working lives with one organization. The notion that individuals will change jobs several times during their lives has been present in the literature for some time, but the recent trends of corporate restructuring and military downsizing have made this a reality for many more workers. According to an article in *Time*, "Forget any idea of career-long employment with a big company. Even after downsizing is carried to its logical—or illogical—extreme and the layoffs and early retirements stop, the corporate giants are not going to revert to hiring masses of long-term employees" (Church 1993, p. 37). Instead, companies are probably going to depend on a smaller core of permanent employees supplemented by temporary help as well as "outsourcing," buying goods and services from smaller companies (ibid.). They will also continue to focus on improving employee productivity and making better use of information technologies (Richman 1993b). This future scenario is supported by the trends of very rapid growth in temporary help employment during the last decade (Kutscher 1993) and continuing growth in small and medium size businesses: companies employing fewer than 100 workers accounted for over 90 percent of the job growth since 1990 (Richman 1993a). Recent changes affecting those jobs once considered "safe" from layoffs are an indication that individuals need to be prepared for careers that are likely to include involuntary job loss as well as many job changes.

Myth: A College Education Will Guarantee a Good Job

Reality: Although occupations that require a bachelor's degree or other postsecondary education or training are projected to have faster-than-average rates of employment growth in the years 1992-2005 (Silvestri 1993), a college education is no longer a guarantee of a good job. Between now and 2005, an estimated 30 percent of new graduates will either be unemployed or underemployed as compared to the 1984 to 1990 period when an average of 20 percent of each graduating class became "underutilized" (Greenwald 1993). The escalation of this trend is particularly perplexing given the continuing growth in jobs requiring higher levels of education. The slow economy coupled with a permanent reduction of entry-level jobs due to technology account for this projection. Good jobs will still be available but in order to get them graduates will have to be begin looking earlier and be more astute about which job search strategies they use. Participation in internships and cooperative experience will pay dividends in the job search (Farnham 1993).

Despite the fact that a college education will not guarantee a good job, the economic advantages associated with greater schooling are likely to continue because "the future belongs to the knowledge worker" (Church 1993, p. 38). Studies conducted during the 1980s confirm that just a few extra years of schooling are associated with higher earnings, especially when combined with some job experience (Hoachlander, Kaufman, and Wilen 1991). Even though college graduates will continue to have a tougher time getting into the job market, once in the benefits of their education should begin to pay dividends.

Myth: Manufacturing Jobs Will Disappear

Reality: Although manufacturing jobs are projected to continue to decrease, they are a long way from disappearing. Recent figures released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics predict that employment in manufacturing jobs will fall from the 1992 level of 18 million to the 2005 projected level of 17.5 million. This decline is less than the period 1979 to 1993 when manufacturing lost 3 million jobs due to back-to-back recessions (Franklin 1993). A likely scenario for future manufacturing jobs is that they will change radically: new manufacturing jobs will be created that will require different skills and pay less. In Columbus, Indiana, the Cummins Engine Company reopened a plant that it had closed earlier in cost-cutting measures. However, now "flexible work rules have replaced cumbersome ones that once prevailed. And management-labor teamwork has replaced us-against-them" (Rose 1994, p. 1). Also, workers make only about half the former pay and receive fewer benefits (ibid.). The Cummins experience is likely to be replicated again and again as manufacturing jobs are restructured or recreated.

Myth: Technology Will Simplify Work

Reality: During the 1980s, one of the major debates surrounding jobs had to do with the effect of changing technology on skills required for the workplace. Would technology increase or decrease the skills required to enter and succeed in the workplace? (See Bailey 1991 for a summary of this debate.) The current consensus is that technology has not simplified work. Instead, what technology has done is eliminate many low-level jobs (Church 1993; Farnham 1993) and increased the skill levels required for those that remain.

Based on the results of research demonstrating that jobs in the textile and banking industries, which were once considered to require only minimal skills, are becoming increasingly complex and intellectually demanding, Hoachlander, Kaufman, and Wilen (1991) conclude that "the key change in the economy for both manufacturing and service sectors is a shift from mass production to flexible production. Flexible production in manufacturing and service requires workers with a much wider range of skills and capabilities than before" (p. 20).

All indications are that technology will continue to transform the workplace, thus requiring workers to continue to upgrade their skills. According to some experts, high-tech workers must be prepared to return to school to learn new skills every 5 to 10 years (Church 1993).

Myth: Job Growth Will Level Off

Reality: Despite factors such as the slow recovery from the recent recession, unemployment, and underemployment, the United States is still creating about 2 million new jobs every year. This net increase in job growth, which puts the U.S. ahead of some of its foreign competitors, is expected to continue (Church 1993). Figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) project an annual average job growth rate of 1.5 percent for the years 1992-2005. According to BLS projections, service industries will provide more than half of new job growth in this period, with health services and business services predicted to add the most new jobs. In the goods producing sector, which will experience little net job growth, most of the new jobs are expected to be in the construction industry. In the agriculture (farm) sector, BLS predicts no job growth (Franklin 1993).

Although most agree that net job growth will continue, some experts dispute BLS industry-specific projections. For example, some think that agriculture has become a high-tech field and that it may soon experience job growth. And if economist Lester Thurow's prediction that the cost containment aspects of health care reform will result in layoffs of millions of people (Church 1993), then health services may not produce any net job growth.

Implications

Adult, career, and vocational educators can respond to the predictions about jobs of the future in a number of ways:

- Because the future will belong to the knowledge worker, instill in learners the concept of lifelong learning. Those individuals who are prepared to engage in continuing learning both on and off the job will be the ones who will have the advantage in the workplace.
- Integrate higher-level thinking skills such as problem solving and teamwork throughout the curriculum. These are the skills that prepare individuals for the "flexible" workplace. Mastery of basic skills is no longer sufficient as workers must know when and how to apply them.
- Encourage learners to participate in work experience as a part of their education. College graduates who have engaged in internships or other cooperative learning experiences have a distinct advantage in the job market. However, these work experiences are valuable for other reasons, including providing a meaningful context for skills acquired in an academic setting.
- Prepare learners to expect career changes by talking about nonlinear career paths. If individuals understand that they can anticipate and plan for job changes, they may feel more in control of their individual career planning. Although involuntary job loss is never easy, knowing that it may disrupt their careers in the future can help individuals prepare for it.

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